National Park Service

Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve

Kingsley Plantation Grounds Tour Brochure

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Where to Start…

During Florida's plantation period (1763-1865), Fort George Island was owned by many planters. The site name comes from one of those owners, Zephaniah Kingsley. The Kingsleys lived here from 1814 to 1837.

This tour begins at the Slave Quarters. Thirty-two tabby cabins were home to the enslaved workforce. The remains of twenty-three cabins can be seen today.

Much of this one thousand acre island was used for growing crops during the plantation period. Agricultural use ended around 1900 and since then most of the fields have reverted back to forest.

Kingsley Plantation represents a tumultuous time and place in Florida's past. The ever-changing political, social, and economic climate greatly effected the lives of both free and slave. Failed crops could bankrupt the owner, which often resulted in slave families being sold apart. Despite the often harsh conditions of bondage, slaves not only persevered, but developed a richly diverse culture. The lives of the owners and slaves were closely intertwined.

Protecting America's Special Places

Before you begin your tour, please remember that all natural and cultural resources are protected in National Park areas. This means that you must leave all plants, animals, historic structures and objects as you find them. The tabby structures at the Slave Quarters are very fragile. During your visit you will see deliberate abuse, called vandalism, but visitors also unintentionally cause damage by being careless. Help us preserve these historic buildings for future generations.

- DO NOT climb on any part of the buildings or touch the tabby walls. There is a piece of tabby for you to touch on exhibit next to the slave cabin with the roof.

- Any objects you find have historic significance to the site, so please leave them where you find them and notify park staff.

- Please help protect our national treasures by reporting damaging acts to park staff. You can also phone (904) 251-3537.

Stop 1: Looking Beyond the Slave Quarters

Many slaves worked in the fields, which were located along the road to the south of the Slave Quarters. The main cash crop was Sea Island cotton. Other crops included sugar cane, corn, beans, and potatoes.

On this Sea Island plantation, slaves were assigned work according to the task system. A task was the specific amount of work required for each slave to finish daily. Many enslaved people worked in the fields, others did house work or skilled tasks such as carpentry or blacksmithing. When the task was finished, slaves used whatever remained of the day to hunt, fish, garden, prepare meals, or tend to other personal needs.

Slave artifacts, recovered through archaeology, offer clues to daily life. Many traditions and stories of slave life were passed down orally. Some former slaves told their life stories to interviewers or even wrote about their experiences. Owners often kept journals recording daily slave life. Explore the historical buildings and grounds and learn more about life on a plantation.

Stop 2: The Slave Quarters

These structures were built with a material called tabby. Oyster shells, one of the main ingredients, were left by the Timucua Indians and their ancestors. When the planters and slaves first arrived, the shell middens provided abundant building material. Skilled slaves burned the oyster shells to make lime, which was mixed with sand and water. This “concrete” was poured to make the walls. The wooden roofs and doors were added after the tabby hardened and dried. The holes you see in many of the walls were part of the construction process and were filled in while people lived here.

The Slave Quarters were the homes for sixty toeighty men, women, and children. Each Slave Quarter had a fire place and “kitchen,” where slaves prepared their nightly meals, and a room to sleep in. Slaves might have received cornmeal, molasses, salt and other basic provisions from the plantation owner, but they had to grow or gather the rest of their food and supplies on a plot of land provided for them. Enslaved families often chose to grow the food of their African cultures. Yams, okra, blackeyed peas, eggplant, and sesame are a few examples.

Stop 3: Size and Shape

The slave quarters at Kingsley Plantation are laid out in a unique way. Instead of a straight line, the houses form a semi-circle. This pattern is similar to village design in some areas of West Africa.
Notice that the buildings are not all the same size. The larger ones, at the ends of each row, were given to the Driver and his family for the extra responsibility of managing the daily work assignments and reporting to the owner. They were also shared for community activities such as cooking, or were given to a skilled slave craftsman as a show of status.

Before continuing to Stop 4, take a moment and look in the direction of the Plantation House.

During the plantation period this now wooded area would have been an open field, with a clear view of the other plantation buildings.

Stop 4: Barn

Like the Slave Quarters, the walls are made of tabby. This barn had multiple uses such as storage, housing for animals, a work place for slaves, or even living quarters. The oldest part of the barn is the north end, which is made out of tabby brick.

Horses, mules, and oxen pulled plows and wagons, and provided power to operate mills. Cows, pigs, and chickens were raised for food. Buildings that are no longer here included workshops for blacksmiths, carpenters, and other skilled craftsmen. There were also saw and sugar mills.

Notice the windows in the hayloft. Letting in natural light was preferred to having lanterns because of the threat of starting a fire.

Stop 5: Garden

During the spring, summer, and fall the garden provides a first hand look at plantation period crops such as Sea Island cotton, indigo, and sugar cane, as well as personal food items which include peanuts, peas, pumpkins, potatoes, and okra.

Sea Island cotton became the main cash crop beginning in the 1790s. This cotton grew best on the islands along the coast of South Carolina, Georgia, and north Florida. Its strong fibers are long and silky, which make it very valuable.

The cotton plants grow as high as seven feet, and the blooms are at all levels of the plant. The cotton was picked daily from late July to December. Slaves were given the task of removing the seeds by hand and preparing it for shipment to market. During the peak of the cotton harvest (October), a task could last all day.

The four marked posts between the garden area and the Kitchen House lay out a ¼ acre. Plantation tasks (see Stop 1) for field workers were measured in increments of the ¼ acre.

Stop 6: Kitchen

Cooking for the plantation owner and his family was done in a separate building because of heat, noise, smells, and the danger of fire.

The kitchen was a meeting point between African and European cultures. Slave cooks prepared foods traditionally, altering recipes passed down from African ancestors and mixing in local ingredients and new recipes from the owner's family.

After slave cooks prepared meals they carried them to the owner's house to be served. Water was brought from the well or the cistern near this building. The latticed walkway was added in the

1870s.

Stop 7: Waterfront and Owner's Home

The front of the plantation owner's house faces the Fort George River. Most plantations were located along waterways because transportation by ship or boat was the easiest way to get crops to market or to bring in supplies.

The plantation house dates to 1798 and is the oldest plantation house still standing in Florida. It was built for comfort, with four corner rooms and the central two-story section. The stairs to the second floor were located outside on the back porch. The house was designed so that windows on all sides of the rooms would allow breezes to cross ventilate. Each room also originally had a fireplace. Unusual features of the house include the full cellar and the widow's walk on top of the house.

Kingsley Family

When Spain lost control of Florida in 1821, legislators in the new United States Territory quickly enacted laws that greatly reduced the civil liberties of free blacks, such as Kingsley's family members. Zephaniah Kingsley addressed the Territorial Legislature and wrote numerous pamphlets on the importance of maintaining a free black population in Florida.

Zephaniah Kingsley relocated to Spanish Florida in 1803 and became a successful merchant and planter. His African wife, Anta Madgigine Jai was from Senegal. Kingsley purchased her as a slave in Havana, Cuba in 1806. He freed Anna (as she became known) and their children in 1811. In 1814 he moved his family to Fort George Island. Anna took advantage of Spanish views on race and society, which enabled her to own her own plantation and slaves. She also was her husband's business partner and managed his properties in his absence.

His battle to keep a system of society where people were judged by class, and not by color, was a complete failure. By 1832 the harsh laws restricting the rights of all "persons of color" became intolerable. Faced with the reality of his family losing their freedom upon his death, he began looking for a country where they could live without restrictions.

In 1837 Kingsley moved Anna, their two sons, and 50 of his now freed slaves to Haiti, a free black colony. Their two daughters remained in Jacksonville, married to wealthy white men. Zephaniah Kingsley died in 1843 knowing that his family was secure.

The Kingsley story is a window into an important period of sweeping change in Florida's history. The territory's new laws forced free and enslaved people to adapt to reforms in which some gained, but many lost, personal liberties.